

CHAPTER 13
TRUST ACCOUNTS AND CLOSINGS

[Prior to 9/4/02, see 193E—Ch 1]

193E—13.1(543B) Trust account. All earnest payments, all rents collected, property management funds, and other trust funds received by the broker in such capacity or broker associate or salesperson on behalf of the broker's client shall be deposited in a trust account maintained by the broker in an identified trust account, with the word "trust" in the name of the account, in a federally insured bank, savings and loan association, savings bank, or credit union located in Iowa and, for the purposes of this rule, may be referred to as the "depository."

13.1(1) All money belonging to others received by the broker, broker associate or salesperson on the sale, rental, purchase, or exchange of real property located in Iowa are trust funds and must be deposited in a trust account. This shall include, but not be limited to, receipts from property management contracts; rental or lease contracts; advance fee contracts; escrow contracts; collection contracts; earnest money contracts; or money received by a broker for future investment or other purpose, except a nonrefundable retainer need not be placed in an escrow account if specifically provided for in the written agreement between the broker and the broker's principal.

a. All trust funds must be deposited into the broker's trust account by no later than five banking days after the date indicated on the document that the last signature of acceptance of the offer to purchase, rent, lease, exchange, or option is obtained.

b. Money belonging to others shall not be invested in any type of fixed-term maturity account, security or certificate without the written consent of the party or parties to whom the money belongs.

c. A broker shall not commingle personal funds in a trust account; provided, however, that not more than \$500 of the broker's personal funds may be maintained in each separate account if (1) such personal funds are separately accounted for and (2) such personal funds are intended to be used by the broker to pay for expenses directly related to maintaining the account.

The broker shall ensure that personal funds are deposited to cover bank service charges as specified in Iowa Code section 543B.46, and that at no time are trust moneys used to cover any charges. Upon notification that the broker's personal funds are not sufficient to cover service charges initiated by the bank that are above the normal maintenance charges, the broker shall deposit personal funds to correct the deficiency within 15 calendar days of the closing date of that bank statement.

d. Money held in the trust account, which becomes due and payable to the broker, shall be promptly withdrawn by the broker.

e. The broker shall not use the trust account as a business operating account or for personal use. Commissions, salaries, related items and normal business expenses shall not be disbursed directly from the trust account.

13.1(2) Unless there is a written agreement between all parties to the transaction to the contrary, all interest earned on the trust account shall be transferred on a calendar quarter basis to the state. The amount to be remitted to the state will be the amount of interest earned less any service charges directly attributable to the requirement of maintaining an interest-bearing account and of remitting the interest to the state. The broker may have the depository remit the interest directly or the broker may remit the interest but, in either case, it shall be the responsibility of the broker to see that the interest is remitted. The broker may, but shall not be required to, inform the parties to the transaction of the intended use of the interest.

a. If the interest is remitted by the broker, the broker should use the commission-approved Real Estate Interest Remittance Form and include a copy of the applicable bank statement(s) showing the interest paid and the service charges attributable to maintaining the account.

b. If the interest is remitted by the broker, the broker shall mail the interest remittance check and required documentation to:

The State of Iowa
c/o Bankers Trust Company
P.O. Box 4686
Des Moines, Iowa 50306

c. The depository should use the name "Iowa Department of Economic Development" and the federal tax information number (TIN) 42-6004545 on the 1099 reporting form when reporting the interest to the IRS.

d. The depository should send the 1099 reporting form to:
Iowa Department of Economic Development
200 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50309

e. If the property management or rental account is interest-bearing, the interest shall be transferred on a calendar quarter basis to the state unless there is a written agreement paying the interest to the property owner.

f. In no event shall the broker be paid interest earned on moneys held in trust for others by the broker.

13.1(3) A trust account may bear interest to be disbursed to (1) the buyer or seller involved in a real estate purchase, sale or exchange transaction, or (2) the property owner, if the property management or rental contract contains this specific provision, or (3) as otherwise specifically allowed or provided in Iowa Code sections 562A.12(2) and 562B.13(2).

13.1(4) Receipts from property management and rental account transactions may be deposited in a trust account separate from real estate transaction funds. If separately maintained, this account shall not be required to be an interest-bearing account.

a. The broker shall provide to the broker's client a complete accounting of all moneys received and disbursed from the trust account(s) not less often than annually.

b. A broker may only utilize a separate property management or rents trust account for those moneys received by a broker pursuant to a written property management or rental agreement.

13.1(5) A broker shall be required to open and maintain one or more trust accounts if the broker receives or expects to receive trust funds. For each separate trust account opened, the broker shall file with the commission a written Consent to Examine and Audit Trust Account form which irrevocably authorizes the commission to examine and audit the trust account. The form of consent shall be prescribed by and available from the commission, and shall include the account names and number, and the name and address of the depository.

a. If the broker does not expect to receive trust funds, the broker shall file an affidavit with the commission on a form prescribed by and available from the commission.

b. If trust funds are received by the broker after filing an affidavit, the broker must immediately open a trust account and file the appropriate Consent to Examine and Audit Trust Account form with the commission.

c. As provided by Iowa Code section 543B.46(3), a consent to examine is not required for a separate farm business operating account in the name of the owner or owners and used by either the farm owner or farm manager or agent to conduct business as a part of a written farm management agreement.

d. As provided by Iowa Code section 543B.46(3), a consent to examine is not required for a separate property management account in the name of the owner or owners and used by either the property owner or property manager or agent to conduct property management as a part of a written property management agreement.

13.1(6) Each broker required to maintain a trust account shall maintain at all times a record of each account, as required by these rules, in the place of business, consisting of at least the following:

a. A record called a journal which records in chronological order all receipts and disbursements of moneys in the trust account.

(1) For receipts, the journal for each trust account must include the date, name of depositor, the check number and the amount deposited, and the name of principal or identify the property.

(2) For disbursements, the journal for each trust account must include the date, name of payee, name of principal or identify the property, the check number and the amount disbursed.

(3) The journal must provide a means for monthly reconciliation on a written worksheet of the general ledger balance with the bank balance and with the individual ledger accounts to ensure agreement.

b. Real estate sales transactions shall additionally require an individual ledger account identified by the property or the principal, which records all receipts and disbursements of the transaction and clearly separates the transaction from all others. The individual ledger account shall include the date, check number, amount, name of payee or depositor or explanation of activity with a running balance.

c. Property management trust account records shall additionally include an individual ledger account for each tenant, identifying the tenant's rental unit and security deposit and including all receipts and disbursements together with check number and date. The journal for each account shall be maintained as an owner's ledger account for all properties owned by each owner showing receipts and disbursements applicable to each property managed.

(1) All disbursements must be documented by bids, contracts, invoices or other appropriate written documentation.

(2) The running balance may be determined at the time of monthly reconciliation.

d. Trust account supporting documents shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

(1) Bank statements;

(2) Canceled checks;

(3) Copies of contracts, listing, sales, rental and leasing;

(4) Closing statements;

(5) Pertinent correspondence; and

(6) Any additional items necessary to verify or explain an entry.

13.1(7) Funds shall only be disbursed from the trust account as provided by the terms and conditions of the contract or escrow agreement. No funds shall be disbursed from the trust account prior to the closing, or other than as provided by the terms of the escrow agreement, without the informed written consent of all the parties. In the event of a dispute over the return or forfeiture of an earnest money deposit or the disbursement of an escrow deposit held by a broker, the broker shall continue to hold the deposit in the trust account until one of the following conditions is met:

a. The broker is in receipt of a written release from all parties to the transaction consenting to the disposition of the deposit or escrow funds; or

b. The broker is in receipt of a final judgment of the court directing the disposition of the deposit or escrow funds; or

c. There is a final decision of a binding alternative dispute resolution process, or mediation directing the disposition of the deposit or escrow funds; or

d. A civil court action is filed by one or more of the parties to determine the disposition of the deposit or escrow funds, at which time the broker may seek court authorization to pay the deposit or escrow funds into court.

13.1(8) No funds shall be disbursed from the trust account prior to the closing without the informed written consent of all the parties to the transaction as provided in 13.1(7), except in accordance with this rule. Nothing in this rule requires a broker to remove money from the broker's trust account when the disposition of such money is disputed by the parties to the transaction. The commission will not take disciplinary action against a broker who in good faith disburses trust account moneys pursuant to this rule.

a. In the absence of a pending civil court action or written agreement, it shall not be grounds for disciplinary action when, upon passage of 30 days from the date of the dispute, a broker disburses the earnest money deposit to a buyer, renter, or lessee in a transaction based upon a good faith decision that a contingency has not been met, but disbursement shall be made only after the broker has given 30 days' written notice by certified mail to all parties concerned at their last-known addresses, setting forth the broker's proposed action and the grounds for the decision.

b. In the absence of a pending civil action or written agreement, it shall not be grounds for disciplinary action when, upon passage of six months from the date of the dispute, a broker disburses the earnest money deposit to a seller or landlord in a transaction based upon a good faith decision that the buyer, renter, or lessee has failed to perform as agreed, but disbursement shall be made only after the broker has given 30 days' written notice by certified mail to all parties concerned at their last-known addresses, setting forth the broker's proposed action and grounds for the decision.

c. The dispute must be legitimate. If a buyer or seller, or a landlord or lessee, or a renter demands the return of the earnest money deposit, the broker shall consult with the other party who may agree or disagree with the return.

13.1(9) Under no circumstances is the broker entitled to withhold any portion of the earnest money when a transaction fails to consummate even if a commission is earned. The earnest money must be disposed of as provided in 13.1(7), 13.1(8), or 13.1(10), and the broker shall pursue any claim for commission or compensation against the broker's client.

13.1(10) Interpleader. Anytime the broker in good faith believes that the parties disputing the return of the deposit will not agree on the disposition of the deposit or file a civil court action to determine the disposition of the deposit, then the broker may elect to file an interpleader action with the appropriate court pursuant to Iowa Rules of Civil Procedure and pay the deposit into court. The broker may, in filing such an interpleader court action:

a. Attempt to claim a part of the deposit pursuant to the listing contract with the seller, if the seller is successful in the suit.

b. Disclaim any part of the deposit and request the court to restrain the buyer and the seller from naming the broker in the civil suit and order them to litigate their claims to the deposit.

13.1(11) A trust account may bear interest to be disbursed to the buyers or sellers with the written approval of all parties to the contract or to the owner if the trust account is for a property management account and the management contract so specifies, or as otherwise specifically allowed or provided in Iowa Code sections 562A.12(2) and 562B.13(2). The account shall be a separate account from the account(s) which is to accrue interest to the state. The broker shall not benefit from interest received on funds of others in the broker's possession. Interest shall be disbursed to the owner or owners of the funds at the time of settlement of the transaction or as agreed in the management contract and shall be properly accounted for on closing statements. Service charges for the account are a business expense of the broker and shall not be deducted from the proceeds.

13.1(12) Property management account funds may be withdrawn at any time for the purpose of returning the funds to the payee in accordance with the terms of the contract or receipt.

13.1(13) Property management funds may be withdrawn when and if the broker reasonably believes, from evidence available, that the tenant has obtained a rental or lease through information supplied by or on behalf of the broker.

13.1(14) Trust funds that are not traceable to any individual for disbursement from the trust account are unclaimed property. Unclaimed trust funds must be entered on a separate individual ledger for accounting purposes. In accordance with Iowa Code chapter 556, after three years, unclaimed trust funds shall be paid to:

Treasurer
State of Iowa
Unclaimed Property Division
Hoover State Office Building
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

193E—13.2(543B) Closing transactions. It shall be mandatory for every broker to deliver to the seller in every real estate transaction, at the time the transaction is consummated, a complete detailed statement, showing all of the receipts and disbursements handled by the broker. Also, the broker shall at the same time deliver to the buyer a complete statement showing all moneys received in the transaction from the buyer and how and for what the same were disbursed.

13.2(1) In the event all funds being held by the broker for a transaction cannot be disbursed at the time of closing, the broker shall obtain an escrow agreement signed by both parties to the transaction which shall direct the broker regarding the future disbursement of the funds.

13.2(2) The broker shall retain all trust account records and a complete file on each transaction for a period of at least five years after the date of the closing, which shall include one copy of the listing, any offers to purchase, all correspondence pertinent to the transaction, and the closing statement.

13.2(3) The listing broker shall be responsible for the closing even though the closing may be completed by another licensee.

13.2(4) If the closing transaction is handled through an unlicensed escrow agent and the escrow agent renders a closing statement, the listing broker shall ensure that funds which the broker has received or paid as part of the transaction are accounted for properly.

13.2(5) In the case of a cooperative sale between brokers, the listing broker may elect to close the transaction or, by prior agreement, authorize the selling broker to close.

a. If the listing broker so elects, the selling broker shall have the buyer make the earnest money check or money order payable to the listing broker and shall immediately deliver the earnest money check or money order along with the offer to purchase to the listing broker or listing agent.

b. Unless by prior agreement the listing broker has authorized the selling broker to close, the offer to purchase shall designate that the earnest money is to be held in trust by the listing broker.

c. Unless by prior agreement the listing broker has authorized the selling broker to close, when cash is accepted as earnest money by the selling agent, the selling agent must deposit the money in the selling broker's trust account in accordance with commission rules, and then immediately transfer the earnest money deposit to the listing broker by issuing a check drawn on the selling broker's trust account.

13.2(6) Any means other than cash or an immediately cashable check shall not be accepted as earnest money unless that fact is communicated to the seller prior to the acceptance of the offer to purchase, and is stated in the offer to purchase.

13.2(7) Brokers acting as agents for the buyer in a specific real estate transaction shall have the same requirements for retention of copies as stated in this rule, except that a buyer's agent who is not a party to the listing contract is not required to retain a copy of the listing contract or the seller's settlement statement.

13.2(8) Iowa Ct. R. 37.5, limited real estate practice. All Iowa real estate licensees should be aware that Iowa Ct. R. 37.5 authorizes nonlawyers to select, prepare, and complete certain legal documents incident to residential real estate transactions of four units or less. The preparation of documents beyond that authorized by this court rule may constitute the unauthorized practice of law.

a. Except to the extent authorized by the court rule, the selection, preparation, and completion of legal documents in connection with real estate transactions by nonlawyers constitutes the unauthorized practice of law unless the nonlawyer is acting on the person's own behalf as a buyer or seller.

b. Upon written request of a buyer or seller, a nonlawyer may select, prepare, and complete form documents for use incident to a residential real estate transaction of four units or less. Such documents shall be limited to:

(1) Offers to purchase or purchase agreements, provided the parties are given written notice that these are binding legal documents and competent legal advice should be sought before signing;

(2) Groundwater hazard statements; and

(3) Declaration of value forms.

c. Nonlawyers may not charge for preparation of the legal documents authorized by the court rule. Nonlawyers shall not select, prepare or complete:

(1) Deeds;

(2) Real estate installment sales contracts;

(3) Affidavits of identity or nonidentity;

(4) Affidavits of payment of spousal or child support; or

(5) Any other documents necessary to correct title problems or deficiencies.

193E—13.3(543B) Salesperson shall not handle closing. A salesperson shall not handle the closing of any real estate transaction except under the direct supervision or with the consent of the employing broker.

193E—13.4(543B) Consent to return earnest money not required. When an offer to purchase is withdrawn or the acceptance is revoked without liability pursuant to Iowa Code chapter 558A, any earnest money deposit shall be promptly returned to the buyer without delay. The seller's consent and agreement to release the funds is not required. A copy of the written revocation or withdrawal shall be retained with the trust account supporting documents.

193E—13.5(543B) File record keeping. Every broker shall retain for a period of at least five years true copies of all business books; accounts, including voided checks; records; contracts; closing statements; disclosures; signed documents; and correspondence relating to each real estate transaction that the broker has handled and each property managed. The records shall be made available for inspection by the commission, staff, and its authorized representatives at all times during usual business hours at the broker's regular place of business. If the brokerage closes, the records shall be made available for inspection by the commission, staff, and its authorized representatives upon request.

193E—13.6(543B) Licensee acting as a principal. When a licensee is acting in the capacity of a real estate broker, broker associate or salesperson and is also a principal in the sale, lease, rental or exchange of property owned by the licensee, all payments, rent, or security deposits received from the lessee, renter or buyer must be deposited into the broker's trust account. The use of the broker's trust account is not required if all of the following exist:

1. The sale, rental, or exchange is strictly, clearly and completely a "by owner" transaction and there is not a listing or brokerage agreement;

2. No commission or other compensation is paid to or received by the licensee; and

3. The licensee does not function throughout the transaction in any capacity requiring a real estate license.

These rules are intended to implement Iowa Code chapters 17A, 272C and 543B.

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